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LESSONS FROM THE PAST

THE map reproduced in the center of this report is of Rome, Italy, for many centuries referred to merely as "The City." It looks like the map of a rapidly growing city which has extended its city limits beyond the built-up area. Actually, it is just the opposite. It is a map of a shrinking city, where residential buildings were gradually replaced by farms and vineyards. This map was drawn by John Senex and was a part of his General Atlas of the World, published in 1721. In the same year in which this map was published, the population of Rome was reported as 134,254. In A.D. 14, in the reign of Augustus, Rome was the capital of the world. At that time within the walls (the same area shown on this map) there was a population of more than one million people, or approximately 300 persons per acre. By A.D. 74, in the reign of Vespasian, the population of Rome had increased to approximately a million and a half, and at that time the density of population was 381 persons per acre.

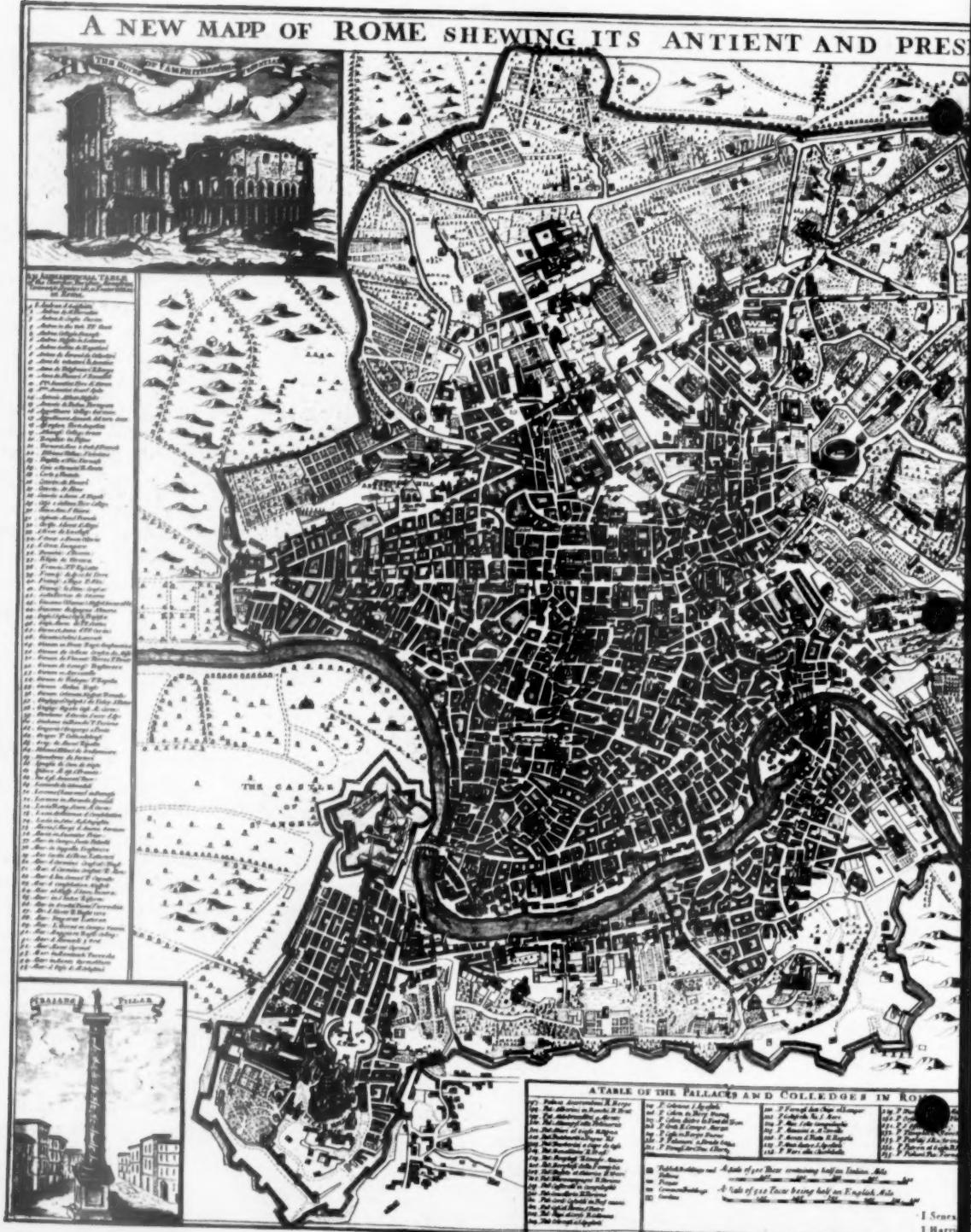
With the decline and fall of the Roman Empire, the city of Rome ceased to be the capital of the world and became merely the capital of a second-rate power. The population gradually shrank, as it was now unnecessary to maintain a vast corps of government employees, and, as the buildings on the less valuable land gradually depreciated, they were torn down. In time the land was returned to agricultural use, although it was within the walls shown on this map in red.

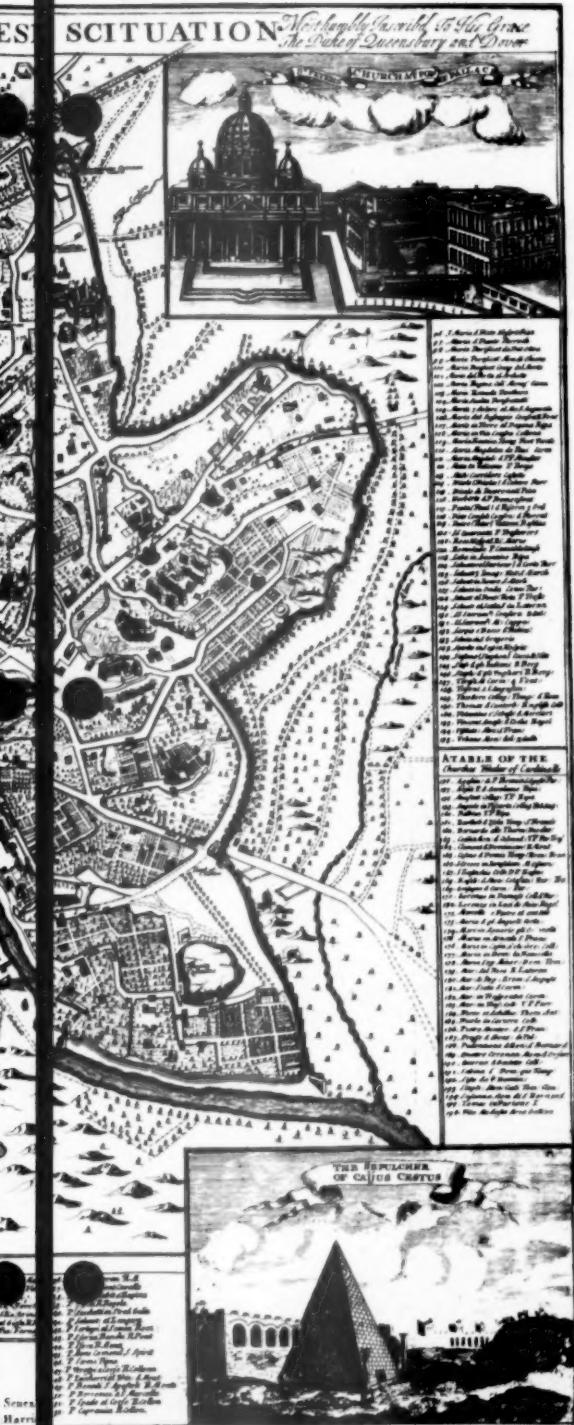
The population of Rome in the first century is quite astonishing. A density of 381 persons per acre is 2.7 times the density shown by the United States Census for Manhattan Island in 1950. With all of its skyscraper apartments, Manhattan Island averaged 139.2 persons per acre in that year.

High densities per acre were rather common in early cities. Contrary to present opinions, a large part of the area of these cities was closely built up with three-, four-, five-, six-, and even seven-story buildings. In Rome, the lower classes lived in "insulae," which were large buildings separated from adjoining buildings by a space at least five feet in width. Many of these buildings would be the equivalent of a present block, in size, with a solid front on all four sides, and a court in the center. The lanes which separated them from adjoining buildings were quite narrow, and most families in these buildings lived in very

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A NEW MAPP OF ROME SHEWING ITS ANTIENT AND PRESENT STATE.





EXPLANATION OF THE MAP

This map was published in 1721 by John Senex, an English cartographer with his headquarters in London. It was a part of his General Atlas of the World. It shows the city of Rome as of 1721. The red on the map shows the location of the city wall, a close-up of which is shown in the background of the picture in the lower right-hand corner. The spot pictured in this close-up actually appears on the map 1-3/4 inches above the picture, and approximately a quarter of an inch to the right of the left-hand border of the picture. The location of the wall around Rome was unchanged from the time of the Caesars.

Many of the shaded portions of the map which look like city blocks are large multifamily buildings, known to the Romans as "insulae." By law, these buildings must be separated from adjoining buildings by at least five feet, and the lanes which separated them give the appearance on the map of small streets. Most of these buildings had a court in the center, and were limited in height to 70 feet.

These buildings would correspond to poor tenement houses, and were the result of the unavoidable crowding of the people in the central and cheaper districts. Many of these buildings were constructed primarily of wood and plaster, and were of flimsy construction. The upper stories in these buildings were reached in some cases by ladders, and in others by stairs which, in some cases, had as many as 100 steps. Some of the buildings were built on the sides of hills with access to the upper floors from the hillside, and access to the lower floors from the valley. Often, single-room apartments were used only for eating and sleeping, and were furnished with bits of crockery, broken pieces of furniture, and a pile of straw for a bed.

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limited space. The slaves were herded together in basements and subterranean quarters underneath the larger buildings. Many of the buildings were very poorly constructed, and accidents and fires were quite common. According to the third Satire of Juvenal, "Only the rich sleep well in the City."

At the time this map was drawn in 1721, the population of Rome had shrunk to about one-eleventh of its peak size. Shortly after this, however, Rome again started to grow, until today it has a population which exceeds the population in the first century. The density per acre, however, is not so great, as it is spread out over a considerably larger area.

This map and population study has suggested to me a number of thoughts.

1. In the United States we have generally assumed that cities continue to grow, although we have examples of a number of cities in the United States where out-migration has exceeded inmigration by a considerable percentage.
2. Land value depends on use, and when the demand for urban land declines, its value drops, until land which at one time housed hundreds of thousands of people, finds that its highest and best use is in farms and vineyards.
3. High-density concentrations are the result primarily of a lack of rapid transportation. When people had to live close to their work, the land was necessarily overcrowded, with high scarcity values. This was quite apparent in early land values on Manhattan Island. In the 1870's and 1880's, land values on the Lower East Side soared as the old-law tenements (six-story walk-ups) were built, as these old-law tenements crowded a tremendous number of persons in a relatively limited area. This type of overcrowding reached its peak on Manhattan Island in 1910 when, in spite of the fact that parts of the Island were undeveloped, the density per acre over the entire Island was $165\frac{1}{2}$ persons. Subways, elevateds, tunnels and bridges have expanded tremendously the "bedroom" of New York City. We have come to realize that distance is no longer miles but is now minutes. These high population densities, like water impounded in a small area, have disappeared as the barriers of transportation came down and the concentrations leveled out over a far wider area.
4. Congestion in the number of persons per acre in our present-day urban areas has been replaced by a terrific congestion of vehicular traffic on our streets and highways. The average American now feels it necessary to take 3,000 pounds of steel along with him as he moves around within the city area, and the temporary storage space for this excess metal around our shops and offices presents a problem unknown to the ancient Roman.



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